

# Eating Soup with a Spoon: The employment of Fires brigades in the Global War on Terrorism

By LTC John C. Hale

*"Fires brigades have become the Army's 'utility in-fielders' and force providers of choice for those missions because of their functional adaptability and multi-functional capability."*

Samuel R. White

**L**ieutenant Colonel (Retired) John A. Nagl in his book *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* describes the complexity and difficulty in adapting a conventional army to combat an insurgency. A military also must not forget its fundamental capabilities and doctrine. A historical assessment of how the U.S. Army is employing field artillery and Fires brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan is a study in how the Army has forgotten its fundamental doctrinal principles. Fighting our current wars based on limited counterinsurgency and stability doctrine and ignoring Army and joint operations doctrine, fails to use all tools available to combat our current threat. It also highlights that the Army is not applying a holistic approach to combat operations and bridging the gap between counterinsurgency operations and high intensity conflict.

An evaluation of the employment of Fires brigades shows the potential for increases in field artillery competencies in both counterinsurgency operations and high intensity conflict, and increasing the lethal and nonlethal effects in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Army may solve the conundrum of *How to Eat Soup with a Knife* by simply using the right tool for the right job — a

spoon. Through looking at Army and joint doctrine, the capabilities of Fires brigades and applying doctrine and capabilities to the conflict, the Army could increase its effectiveness throughout the spectrum of conflict.

Envision an Army unit capable of operating in a joint and combined environment, capable of synchronizing lethal and nonlethal fires, while conducting full-spectrum operations, possessing the organic capability to support attached forces and with a span of control equivalent to that of XVIII Airborne Corps during Desert Storm ("The Fires Brigade — a critical capability in an era of persistent conflict," a white paper by Samuel R. White). The mission of a Fires brigade is to plan, synchronize, and employ joint and combined fires in support of a division, corps or combined joint task force. These missions previously were conducted by divisional artillery and corps artillery and now fall to the Fires brigade (*Field Manual 3-09.23 Modular Fires Battalions*). A Fires brigade is a multi-functional headquarters capable of being a force Fires headquarters or combined arms headquarters ("Fires Brigade," White).

The Fires brigade can conduct full-spectrum operations with attached air

or ground maneuver forces. It can operate across the full spectrum of conflict, including stability operations, security force operations and foreign internal defense. The Fires brigade has several key elements that give it the flexibility to receive assigned or attached units, including an organic brigade support battalion and signal company. Transforming field artillery brigades to Fires brigades increased both the size and capability of the headquarters. Fires brigade headquarters are organized with lethal effects, fire control, information operations, air support, air defense airspace management and topographic sections. These sections have the full suite of Army Battle Command Systems enabling the brigade to have a span of control that is limited only by the density of forces assigned or attached (*Field Manual 3-09.23 Modular Fires Battalions*).

Fires brigades have seen their missions and core competencies decay following Army transformation into a brigade-centric organization ("The King and I: the impending crisis in field artillery's ability to provide fire support to maneuver commanders," a white paper by Sean MacFarland, *et al*). This is due, in part, to the nature of counterinsurgency warfare and to Fires brigades' use in a myriad of secondary missions. There is a belief in the military that artillery units are not suited to counterinsurgency warfare (See "Field Artillery in Military Operations Other Than War: An Overview of the U.S. Experience," a paper by Lawrence Yates). Fires brigades are being deployed piecemeal, without using their true full-spectrum capabilities (see "Fires Brigade," White). This has resulted in the fragmentation of unit command and control and the atrophy of core field artillery skills and Fires brigade headquarters' competency in full-spectrum operations.

LTG William B. Caldwell stated, at the 2008 Fires Seminar at Fort Sill, Okla., "As former Army Chief of Staff General Shinseki once said, 'Warfighting is about fires and maneuver — fires enable maneuver; maneuver enables fires. You can't have a discussion on just one of those principles. Close supporting indirect fires destroy the enemy, suppress the enemy's capabili-

ties and then protect our forces.'" Caldwell's statement is not directed at only high intensity conflict, but full-spectrum operations, including counterinsurgency operations. With an understanding of Fires brigades capabilities, senior leaders can realize how operations can be enhanced through their employment. Army and joint doctrine form the foundation of employment for all military units. The emerging doctrine of Fires brigades' employment is not well known, nor is their organization and capabilities. A comparison of doctrinal references shows where efficiencies can be gained by fully employing Fires brigades on the battlefield, as opposed to their current piecemeal employment throughout a theater of operation. The current practice of deploying only pieces and parts of a Fires brigade results in the loss of an entire brigade for 18 to 24 months without maximizing the capabilities of the entire brigade or fully using its true capabilities to integrate and synchronize Fires. (See *Field Manual 1-02 Operational Terms and Graphics*). The current cycle of deployments for many units is one year on and one year off. Deploying only one-third of a unit during this cycle means the entire unit is unavailable for deployment over a two year period. The employment of forces in accordance with doctrine may help commanders mitigate risk while maximizing the Fires brigades' capabilities regarding Fires employment.

Before assuming his duties as commanding general of International Security Assistance Force, GEN Stanley A. McChrystal stated an intention of his command in Afghanistan is to "reduce civilian casualties in Afghanistan." The major cause of civilian casualties in Afghanistan is the delivery of munitions by aircraft ("NATO airstrike in Afghanistan kills up to 90" an Associated Press story by Frank Jordans). International Security Assistance Force is a multinational force operating at the combined joint task force level in Afghanistan, encompassing both the strategic and operational levels of war, yet it has no dedicated Fire support echelon supporting operations across the country. International Security Assistance Force is not a standing corps or theater headquarters, adding to the difficulty of integrating fires into operations and the command and control of various Fire support assets in a multinational environment ("Integration of Lethal and Nonlethal Fires: the future of the joint fires cell," monograph by Dewey A. Granger).

The field artillery as a branch has been described as a "dead branch walking" and in search of its role for eight years (King and I, McFarland). A way ahead is for Fires brigades to educate the Army and joint force on their full-spectrum nature and on the capabilities they bring to any battlefield across the spectrum

Soldiers of 2nd Platoon, B Battery, 1-321st Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, fire a round during a calibration mission at Forward Operating Base Clark, Afghanistan, Nov. 28, 2009.

(Photo courtesy of 1-321st Airborne Field Artillery Regiment)



of conflict. The solution for increasing effectiveness of troops in the field, economical use of forces available and enhancement of effective unit employment is to deploy Fires brigades as complete units. This option brings to bear the counterinsurgency operations capabilities of a brigade and the lethal and nonlethal integration needed during any full-spectrum engagement.

Fires in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. The employment of Fires brigades and corps/division fire support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan highlight both the versatility of Fires brigades and identify the need for fire support augmentation at the corps and division levels. The employment of 18th Field Artillery Brigade, 41st Fires Brigade and 17th Fires Brigade in Iraq, highlight the Fires brigades' capabilities to operate as a maneuver headquarters or conduct security operations in a counterinsurgency operations environment. No Fires brigade as a whole has deployed to Afghanistan; however the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Artillery was employed as a maneuver headquarters in Afghanistan. The 18<sup>th</sup> Fires Brigade currently has multiple units deployed to Afghanistan but without its brigade headquarters, brigade support battalion and signal company. Corps and division fire support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan show weaknesses in fire support structure specifically related to fire control. Case studies of Fires brigade employment in Afghanistan and Iraq identify considerations for the employing Fires brigades and some best practices for the augmentation and support of corps and division operations (monograph by Dewey A. Granger).

The deployment of 17th Fires Brigade and 41st Fires Brigade highlight several fundamental considerations when employing a

Fires brigade for full-spectrum operations. First is the difference in structure between a Fires brigade and a brigade combat team. Fires brigades lack several key enablers organic to a brigade combat team, specifically the military intelligence and engineer companies. Second, the staff structure of a brigade combat team is more robust than a Fires brigade. Engineer and civil affairs sections are not authorized in a Fires brigade headquarters. Third, the deployment of a Fires brigade should include its signal company and brigade support battalion. Omitting these units leaves the Fires Brigade Headquarters unable to communicate or support assigned and attached units. Using the principals of war as evaluation criteria, the deployment of 17th Fires Brigade and 41st Fires Brigade meet the criteria of maneuver, unity of command and economy of force. The employment of field artillery units as maneuver forces integrates fires and maneuver within the brigade's area of operations. The inclusion of attached and assigned units in the deployment meets the unity of command. Economy of force is met by maximizing the employment of all brigade units in its mission. All assigned brigade forces were committed in support of the brigade's mission with no forces underutilized.

The 18th Fires Brigade Headquarters deployed a small detachment from the brigade headquarters to support Multi-National Division-Baghdad, in addition to supporting Afghanistan with two batteries of 155-mm howitzer (3rd Battalion, 321st Field Artillery), a High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System battery (3-27 Field Artillery) and a target acquisition battery (D Company, 26th Field Artillery), all splitting command and control of the brigade. The brigade headquarter detachment's mission was ostensibly to



Soldiers of 2nd Platoon, C Battery, 1-321st Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, fire a round from their M777A2 howitzer in Afghanistan in 2009. (Photo courtesy of LTC John C. Hale)

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perform a force field artillery function. During a pre-deployment site survey, the mission became providing augmentees to various division staff sections. The largest element in the mission was to augment the division's Iraqi security force cell. The headquarters (minus) mission was staff augmentation of seven division staff elements. The personnel deployed on this mission were under the command and control of their various sections and not linked together in any way. The deployment of 40 personnel from 18th Fires Brigade Headquarters, out of a deployable strength of 120 personnel used 35 percent of the headquarters. The remaining 65 percent was, therefore, combat ineffective and unable to deploy in support of other required missions.

The employment of 18th Fires Brigade in Operation Enduring Freedom identifies a common problem of how Fires brigades are being deployed throughout the Central Command area of responsibility. It was deployed in piecemeal fashion and fails to meet the evaluation criteria for maneuver, economy of force and unity of command. Certain elements of the brigade were used to their maximum capability (3-27 Field Artillery and D/26th Field Artillery), but the brigade as a whole was underutilized and did not maximize its ability to support maneuver through fires. The deployment of 18th Fires Brigade fails maneuver by lacking an integration of maneuver and fire support in its area of operations.

The employment of specific units within the brigade shows a lack of synergy in this synchronization, specifically having the brigade headquarters augmenting a division staff with no significant fire support functions and the lack of a synchronizing element for fires in Afghanistan theater of operations. Economy of force was not met through the lack of employment of all combat power available. The brigade headquarters, brigade support battalion and signal company were not employed to maximize their capabilities and used during the deployment. Although several brigade elements were deployed, 60 percent of the brigade remained in the U.S., leaving its capabilities unused and unable to function fully as a unit. Unity of command was not met through the piecemeal employment of the brigade across two theaters with no central focus. The brigade's units were dispersed to perform a myriad of tasks without a central focus for the brigade's main effort. The units and individual Soldiers were used to augment deployed units, dispersing their effectiveness and lacking a common purpose and mission. The deployment did not engage the brigade's combat power toward any common objective and left the brigade working for many commanders across two theater of operations.

The organization of division artillery and a modern Fires brigade is significantly different. The 25th Infantry Division's division artillery performed a full-spectrum maneuver mission in Afghanistan despite these differences. The deployment of the division artillery as a full-spectrum force met the evaluation criteria of maneuver, economy of force and unity of command. It operated as a maneuver headquarters, integrating fires and maneuver across its area of operations, using its attached force while providing fire support functions and fire support augmentation to the division.

The division artillery managed not only a maneuver mission, but fire support coordination across the division's area of operations. The deployment and mission met the definition of economy of force by maximizing the full spectrum capabilities of the head-

quarters, using all headquarters assets to their full capabilities and highlighting the flexibility of field artillery headquarters to perform both maneuver and fire support tasks simultaneously. Unity of command was met by the employment of the headquarters as the focus of development and security within the division area of operation, controlling all provincial reconstruction teams and synchronizing development activities in the division area.

Colonel Dewey A. Granger suggested several solutions to the future of the joint fires cell and the coordination of lethal and nonlethal fires. Noticeably absent from his recommendations are the capabilities and employment of a Fires brigade to enhance the coordination of joint fires in an area of operation. The irony of the need for Fires brigades is that they are not being utilized fully, yet commanders and leaders believe they are fully committed. The demand for Fires brigades COL Granger referenced was in fact only fires augmentation cells, not complete Fires brigades (Integration, Granger).

COL Granger identifies three case studies in his monograph regarding corps and division fires and joint effects cells in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. His first is Combined-Joint Task Force-76 in 2004 to 2005. He highlights the need for the corps artillery headquarters to augment the joint fires and effects coordination cell. He also identifies the nature of the joint fires and effects coordination cell as “an *ad hoc* organization designed to meet the requirements of the emerging environment because doctrinal fires cell manning did not support the current full-spectrum environment.” His second is III Corps Headquarters in 2006 to 2008. One of the functions identified to be performed during this deployment was force field artillery headquarters, a function doctrinally to be performed by a Fires brigade.

The creation of the III Corps joint fires cell for this deployment was possible through the use of subordinate and garrison units' augmentation of the corps staff. The significance of this deployment and the creation of the III Corps structure is “the necessity to relook the (III) Corps Headquarters design in support of future operations.” The third operational example was 10th Mountain Division serving as Combined-Joint Task Force-76 in Afghanistan. The organization and manning at the division level regarding fire support was very limited. Limitations on the division's ability to conduct counter fire, targeting, fire planning and the management of fires assets required the use of augmentees. 10th Mountain Division identified the need for a Fires brigade to support its operations, but was unable to secure one for the Afghan theater due to the “high demand for Fires brigades in Iraq (Integration, Granger).”

The Fires brigade and corps and division artillery case studies review the missions Fires brigades are conducting in Iraq and Afghanistan and could result in gaining additional efficiencies in both the Army's employment of Fires brigades and the mitigation of the weakness in current corps and division fire support capabilities (Integration, Granger). The Fires brigade modular organization allows it to perform a myriad of tasks in addition to its primary mission of synchronizing lethal and nonlethal fires. Mission profiles suitable for a complete Fires brigade include a field artillery headquarters or a full spectrum maneuver headquarters. The organization of Fires brigades is virtually identical in command and control capability to that of a brigade combat team. Through their combat experience in





A Soldier of 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery pulls security while Iraqi police officers work in Baghdad, Iraq. (Photo courtesy of LTC James Frick, U.S. Army)

Iraq and Afghanistan, field artillery Soldiers are far more capable of conducting full-spectrum operations than ever before (Fires Brigade, White). However, the combination of both technical fires skills and the practical counterinsurgency skills found in Fires brigades are being underutilized and underemployed for both operational and tactical commanders. The conclusions drawn from the historical examples of the deployment of Fires brigades and corps and division headquarters highlight the positive and negative employment of Fires brigades and the requirement for augmentation of deployed corps and division headquarters.

**C**onclusions and recommendations. The Army underwent many significant changes in the past decade, including shifts in doctrine, force structure and missions. Army doctrine in 2001 adopted full-spectrum operations as the primary concept of force employment. The transformation of Army forces from a division-centric force to a modular brigade-centric force occurred during just six years. The missions of many units in the Army have evolved due to the nature of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Units now fulfill nonstandard missions, performing tasks they were neither designed nor trained to accomplish.

These three changes would be difficult to accomplish in peacetime, yet the Army adapted and accomplished all three during an era of persistent conflict. Despite the successes of doctrinal changes, transformation and evolving missions, several areas for improvement are clear after evaluating the employment of Fires brigades in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. These areas consist of Army and joint doctrine, field artillery doctrine, force structure for the Fires

brigades, best practices for employment of Fires brigades and future International Security Assistance Force operations in Afghanistan.

The deployments of Fires brigades have not mitigated the weaknesses in the corps and division fire support structures to maximize the effectiveness of fires integration at the operational level. Weaknesses identified through multiple deployments of corps and division headquarters in both Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom have been identified and require redress. An assessment of Fires brigade employment is not complete without a review of the employment of corps and division headquarters in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom — the headquarters Fires brigades were designed to support.

Army and joint counterinsurgency operations and stability doctrine should be reevaluated with respect to fires integration and synchronization and the role of the Fires brigade at the tactical and operational levels. Specific disconnects between the Army's concept of full-spectrum operations and the integration of fires exists. Counterinsurgency and stability doctrine do not nest with the concept of full-spectrum operations for the Army. *Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency* fails to reference the importance of synchronization of lethal and nonlethal fires in counterinsurgency operations and highlights only lethal operations for fires. Joint doctrine has a similar flaw. Although *Joint Publication 3.0 Joint Operations* highlights the integration of fires across the spectrum of conflict, fires is noticeably absent in joint

doctrine for stability and foreign internal defense doctrine. *Field Manual 3.09-24 The Fires Brigade* states the Fires brigade is the provider of all functions previously held by the corps artillery and division artillery at both the tactical and operational levels. Yet these principles are not consistent across both Army and joint doctrine. Joint doctrine must address the role of Army Fires brigades at the operational level because it is the only organization that performs the fires function at the Joint Forces Command level.

Fort Sill must educate the force on Fires brigade capabilities. The Field Artillery Campaign Plan must include an information operations component for Fires brigades. As the Fires brigade proponent, Fort Sill is positioned best to educate through the Army school system and to educate both field commanders and Army leaders that Fires brigades are capable of conducting full-spectrum operations. Field artillery tactical doctrine manuals must be finalized following transformation as well.

Many field artillery doctrinal publications are still in draft form on the Fires Knowledge Network through the Army Knowledge Network portal. These manuals span the entire spectrum of fires tactical units from battery operations to Fires brigade operations. This is also true for fire support doctrinal references at the division and corps level.

The lack of updated doctrinal references creates a significant gap in knowledge for leaders and the force on the employment of fires while conducting full-spectrum operations. Doctrine is not a panacea or a single source of knowledge, but it does provide the foundation for education in the force regarding mission and capabilities with the Army. Doctrine also provides a point of departure for the application of forces in full-spectrum operations and counterinsurgency operations specifically.

The force structure of Fires brigades should be enhanced for conducting full-spectrum operations as defined in *Field Manual 3.0 Operations*. The authorization of several additional positions in the brigade headquarters would benefit full-spectrum operations and enhance the core missions of Fires brigades in the synchronization of lethal and nonlethal fires. Military intelligence capability should be increased to allow enhanced targeting for both lethal and nonlethal fires. Adding a civil affairs officer and engineer officer would enhance a brigade's ability to synchronize fires, both lethal and nonlethal. These minor force structure changes would enhance a Fires brigade's ability to perform full-spectrum operations and enhance the brigade's capability to perform both traditional emerging role as a full-spectrum force.

The 41st Fires Brigade and 17th Fires Brigade deployments provide models for employing Fires brigades. Fires brigades are capable of full-spectrum operations, yet are being used as force providers, while not using their full capabilities. Business rules for employing Fires brigades should be established to maximize their employment in any environment. A recommendation for these rules would be to evaluate Fires brigades holistically, bringing all their forces to bear versus the deployment on only certain units while leaving other units in the U.S. The major consideration for deploying a Fires brigade for full-spectrum operations is the lack of several key elements/units present in a brigade combat team. Deploying modular Fires brigades supports current operations and the sustainment of full-spectrum capability for Fires brigades

through the use of all combat power elements. Deployment of complete Fires brigades allows the full spectrum of by functions to be performed at the brigade. The sustainment and command and control competencies are as important to Fires brigades as the delivery of fires.

International Security Assistance Force is standing up an operational-level headquarters, the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command. This command should consider the employment of a Fires brigade at either its operational level or at the division tactical level. Both levels of command could benefit from a Fires brigade's capabilities. Expansion of International Security Assistance Force operations — including forming an International Security Assistance Force Joint Command — and a possible increase in forces for Afghanistan show an emerging opportunity for Fires brigades to be employed in a manner similar to Iraq, conducting full-spectrum operations; allowing commanders to 'Eat soup with a spoon.'

GEN McChrystal may determine that a Fires brigade is necessary to coordinate and deconflict the increasingly complex operating environment of Afghanistan. A Fires brigade is an option for an increase in forces for International Security Assistance Force, putting increased combat capability into the theater and increasing coalition forces' capabilities to command and control these forces. Deploying a Fires brigade would give International Security Assistance Force a dedicated command to coordinate, synchronize and deconflict fires at the operational level.

Implementing these recommendations will increase the effective employment of Fires brigades in full-spectrum operations. Revising Army and joint doctrine related to fires in counterinsurgency and stability operations would nest with fires employment articulated in *Field Manual 3-0* and *Joint Publication 3-0*. Field artillery doctrine

must be published to aid commanders on the employment of fires units, specifically Fires brigades.

Force structure for the Fires brigades should be enhanced to increase their capabilities to integrate lethal and nonlethal fires. Best practices for deployment of Fires brigades should be established to maximize their employment and capabilities. International Security Assistance Force should request a Fires brigade in Afghanistan to synchronize fires better in that complex environment. Adoption of these recommendations enhances both the full-spectrum capabilities of Fires brigades and the ability of commanders to accomplish their missions.

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